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THE CRITICAL STANDARDS OF HENRY JAMES
A Study of His Change from the Moral to the Aesthetic
in Criticism, Together with the Reasons for the Change

By

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THESIS

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY
SUPERVISION BY Theodore Wayland Douglas

ENTITLED The Critical Standards of Henry James

BE ACCEPTED AS FULFILLING THIS PART OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

"The critic's first duty in the presence of an author's collective works is to seek out some key to his method, some utterance of his literary convictions, some indication of his ruling theory. The amount of labor involved in an inquiry of this kind will depend very much upon the author. In some cases the critic will find expressed declarations; in other cases he will have to content himself with conscientious inductions."

With these words Henry James approaches a study of George Eliot, and it is with this method in mind that I approach a study of Henry James.

It is in the essays more than in the novels and short stories that one finds expressed James's basic convictions. If one had only the novels and stories to judge from, he would have to content himself with conscientious inductions, as many of the commentators on James have already done, with more or less success.

Mr. W. C. Brownell gives a large part of his essay on James to wondering what James's philosophy is

and to drawing certain inductions rather from what he refrains from saying than from what he says. Mr. Brownell says that taste plays a large part in James's philosophy, that it is a cultivated indifference based upon a subconscious moral fastidiousness; and he complains that James assumes the universality of his faith¹ and therefore does not take the trouble to outline it. The first two inductions are affirmed in James's critical essays, insofar as they may be taken to be definitions of

1. Brownell, W. C.: American Prose Masters; N. Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909. p.363. But what this philosophy is, it is idle to speculate. It is doubtless profound enough, and though one does not argue introspection of Mr. James's temperament,-----unless, indeed, his work betray an effort to escape it, as the nuisance it may easily become,-----he could doubtless sketch it for us if inclined, and very eloquently and even elaborately draw out for us its principles and positions. But he has no interest whatever in doing so---no interest in giving us even a hint of it. One may infer that taste plays a large part in it, the taste that some philosophers have made the foundation and standard of morals,----the taste, perhaps, that prevents him from disclosing it. He has the air of assuming its universality, as if, indeed, it were a matter of breeding, a mere preference for "the best" in life as in art, a system, in a word, whose sanctions are instinctive, and so not strongly enough or consciously enough felt to call for emphasis or exposition. No manifestation or quality or incarnation of "the best" evokes his enthusiasm. That it "may prevail" is the youngest of his cares. His philosophy appears in the penumbra of his performance as a cultivated indifference, or at most a subconscious basis of moral fastidiousness on which the superstructure that monopolizes his interest is erected.

phases of aestheticism; but the third errs in the democracy of its viewpoint. It seems to me that, using the same data from which Mr. Brownell drew his conclusions, one might more surely conclude that James felt that his viewpoint was not universally attainable than that it was universally acceptable. It was one of those things which one has, or one does not have,---like table manners; and after a certain age nothing can be done about it. Considering this view of it, one is not surprised that the hope that it may prevail is, as Mr. Brownell expresses it, "the youngest of his cares." Henry James lived to outgrow his public; he made no attempt to drag it along with him, but rather contemptuously accepted its dining-and-wining him, lionizing him, and refraining from reading him.¹

In her book on Henry James, Miss Rebecca West refers to the critical essays which appeared from time to time in The North American Review, The Atlantic Monthly, The Nation, and other preiodicals in the sixties

1. For an exposition of this attitude see James's story in the first volume of The Yellow Book, Vol. I. April 1894. p. 7. The Death of The Lion.

and seventies as a dress rehearsal, a "necessary preface to the literary life."¹ But this practice, which he kept up throughout almost all his literary life, was much more than a dress rehearsal. In these essays which Miss West dismisses with a light allusion to the stage we find that key to his method, that utterance of his literary convictions which James said is essential to a true understanding of a writer. I doubt if a better method could be found of determining a writer's philosophic basis and critical school than following through certain representative essays of his criticism of his contemporaries and noting passages which display these bases most fully. If his views are clearly expressed, the sum total of James's ideas about other writers of his own time should show exactly where he stands in the literary development of that time, and also the standards by which he judged his own work and that of his contemporaries.

1. West, Rebecca: Henry James; London; Nisbet and Company, Ltd. 1916. p. 22. He also went through a necessary preface of the literary life by reading proofs of George Eliot's novels before they appeared in The Atlantic and reviewing. The profession of literature differs from that of the stage in that the stars begin instead of ending as dressers.

The results of this research show that James had a definite philosophical and critical theory which he followed in his judgment of the literary works of the times, and that this basis may be definitely determined by a study of his essays. But no man, unless it be Carlyle, can remain entirely unchanged by his contacts with the world at large; and if he be changing at the same time he is writing, the change in point of view will be shown in his writings. What Henry James eventually became, what he finally represented in American criticism, are things well known and universally established. The ultimate aestheticism of James has been discussed by various writers, and the statements about it range from the rather faltering hypotheses of Mr. Brownell that James's standards were chiefly standards of taste and cultivated indifference, and Miss Rebecca West's light discussion of James's "fling" in The Yellow Book and the influence on him of the decadent aestheticism of the ¹ "fin de siecle" movement of the Naughty Nineties, to

1. West, Rebecca: Henry James; London; Nisbet and Company, Ltd. 1916. pp. 80-84.

Mr. Stuart P. Sherman's statement that "he adored beauty¹ and absolutely nothing else in the world."

If James had been uniformly consistent in his point of view, if he had arrived at his final standards before he began to write and had held them to the end, a study of his critical theory would amount to nothing more than pointing out a few characteristic examples and drawing a general conclusion as to the degree of his aestheticism. But the problem is by no means as simple as that. There is a marked duality in James's critical writings. A constant struggle in the critic between a natural aestheticism and the inculcated principles of Victorian morality ----what Mr. Spingarn calls "the faded moralism of the older types of criticism"----appears in his critical reviews, a struggle in which the aesthetic finally gains

1. Sherman, S. P.: On Contemporary Literature; N. Y.; Henry Holt and Company, 1917. "Aesthetic Idealism of James". p. 234. The thing which James hoped chiefly that his critics would some day recognize is not that he was a great stylist, or a learned historian of manners, or the chief of the realists, or a master of psychological analysis. All these things have been noted and asserted by various more or less irreligious strollers through that cathedral-like edifice to which we have likened his works. The thing which he as high priest solemnly ministering before the high altar implored someone to observe and to declare and to explain is that he adored beauty and absolutely nothing else in the world.

a complete ascendancy.

When Henry James started his critical writing, there was no more perfect Victorian. He stood out Quixote-like against the literary world, armed with the dignity of his twenty-two summers and a matriculation in Harvard Law School, the foe of all literary creations which would not fit comfortably into the stuffy company-parlor of the Puritan conscience. When his literary career closed with his death in 1916, James was the supreme example of pure aestheticism in American letters. When the change began, how long it continued, and what were the various circumstances outer and inner which brought it about, are the matters which I shall attempt to determine in this investigation.

CHAPTER II

THE SCHOOL OF MORALS AND THE AESTHETIC SCHOOL

How does literature justify itself? Is the object of literature pleasure or profit? These questions have been before the public ever since literature came into existence. Differences of opinion on these questions are at the bottom of many of the differences between the various schools of criticism.

Plato banished the poet from his ideal republic, presumably because the poet did not add anything to the general good, because his product was useless. Why, then, is the poet, the writer? Is the production of literature a waste of time? If not, what good does it do?

There were two factions in the argument. The oldest faction, the one which has carried the classical tradition of letters down the ages, is the School of Morals, represented first by Plato and Horace, and then, in English literature, by Sir Philip Sidney, Ben Jonson, John Milton, Alexander Pope, Thomas Carlyle, and many others. This faction held that literature is justified only insofar as it serves as a pleasing method of teaching people and inculcating in them higher moral

principles. The other view, that of the Aesthetic School, was that literature gives pleasure to the intellectual human being, and that this fact is a sufficient justification for its existence. This school figured somewhat in the humanistic revival of the Renaissance and in the rationalistic naturalism of the latter part of the last century and the first of this, but it did not receive complete expression in literary criticism until the time of Shaftesbury.

In 1498 Valle translated Aristotle into Italian, thus bringing in the "sugar coated pill" idea, the claim that the poet (and in all these discussions the word poet was used as a generic term to include all writers of literature) was a teacher, and that his poetry was merely a means of teaching pleasingly. There were further variations of the idea. Aristotle said that the poet was a better teacher than the historian because the poet relates what might have happened, the universal truth, while the historian has to tell mere particulars. In the eighteenth century John Dennis developed the same idea from the Poetics as a basis for

1
morality in criticism. Gironde Cintio said that the poet's chief purpose was to condemn vice and praise virtue. In 1558 Minturno said that the poet teaches virtue and must be virtuous himself, an idea which, when later added to the Puritan ideal of letters, was strikingly brought out in Milton's writings and held also by Ben Jonson, Wordsworth, and Coleridge. By 1566 the idea of the poet as a moral teacher had been carried over from the Italian into France by Jacques Pelletier.

Philosophical and apologetic criticism of literature began in England with Sir Philip Sidney's Defense of Poesie in 1583, although this was not published until 1595, and in the matter of publication was preceded by Harrington's Apology for Poetry which was published in 1591. Daniel's Defense of Rhyme followed shortly after in 1603. These were brought forth by Puritan attacks on the stage and attacks of classicists on English versification. The part of them which has to do with justifying the existence of literature follows the Italian models, basing the right

1. Dennis, John: Grounds of Criticism in Poetry; 1704. For if Poetry be more philosophical, and more instructive, than History, as Aristotle is pleas'd to affirm of it, and no man ever knew the nature of Poetry, or of History, or of Philosophy, better than he did, why then that Art, or rather that Artifice, with which a great many Writers of Verses and Plays debauch and corrupt the people, is a thing to which Poetry is directly contrary.

of literature to exist either on its pleasing or its instructive qualities. The matter chiefly of interest to this inquiry is that even as far back as the end of the sixteenth century the Puritans were attacking literature and making its backers account for it in terms of the practical good to be gained from reading it. The answer that the writers made to the Puritans was in every case that literature teaches, and that its purpose is to teach. That it pleases was considered merely an added advantage in instructing by this method. The Puritans were constantly attacking immorality in literature. Later in the development of the controversy the faction which opposed the Puritan demand for instruction in literature developed the aesthetic idea of art for art's sake, beauty for beauty's sake, which gave them a philosophical basis for objecting to the necessity of moral teachings in works of art; but this aesthetic opposition to morals was not fully developed until the nineteenth century.

In 1605 Bacon's Advancement of Learning opposed the idea of the writer as teacher. He declared in the second book that the fable had been written first and

the moral found afterwards, and that the purpose of poetry is to take the mind to an ideal world.¹ This idea was exemplified in many of the writings of the Romanticists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

But in Every Man in His Humour Ben Jonson exalts the revered name of poet and declares that the poet must be a good man in order to write good poetry. And so through every period of English literature we find exponents of both sides of the question, the original, age-old question whether the purpose of literature is to please or to instruct. On the one side we find a definite School of Morals testing all literature by the lesson it teaches, the good it does; and on the other the Aesthetic School claiming that if literature gives pleasure it justifies its existence in a world which contains all too few pleasures of any sort. The difference, then, is fundamental. Other differences of opinion and theory on matters other than the original justification of literature differentiate classicists from romanticists, humanists from naturalists, and so on, but these differentiations are not pertinent to the matter

1. Bacon, Francis: The Advancement of Learning; Book II: The source of poetry is to be found in the dissatisfaction of the human mind with the actual world, and its purpose is to satisfy man's longing for a more perfect greatness, goodness, and variety than is to be found in the nature of things. Reason doth buckle and bow the mind into the nature of things.

in hand. On the question of the purpose of literature there are but two sides, that of the School of Morals which claims that literature is to instruct, and that of the Aesthetic School which claims that literature is justified only insofar as it pleases.

There is one interesting parallel which I should like to point out before I leave the matter of history and get back to Henry James, who at different times in his life represented each of the two schools, moral and aesthetic.

After the restoration of the Stuart line, in the reigns of Charles II and James II, England went through a period of reaction against Puritanism, a period of hilarious riotousness and vice made beautiful by court trappings which was weakly paralleled at the end of the nineteenth century by the aesthetic naturalism and moral perversion of the "fin de siecle" school of Oscar Wilde, et al. The fundamental ideas of the two movements seem to be much the same. There was the same feeling of irresponsibility, the feeling that the whole movement was the end of a cycle, the mad rush after enjoyments that might at any moment be snatched away. The Cavaliers of the courts of Charles and James

had a double motive for their excesses; they felt the position of the royal house which countenanced their debauches to be not the most firm, and they were making up for lost time, extracting from the present penance for the wasted years of pleasureless Puritanism.

The playhouses, which had been closed throughout the Cromwell regime, were opened to plays more openly immoral, more shockingly lascivious than any of their modern brothers, the nearly-censored Broadway bedroom farces. Certain of the wiser of the court writers foresaw the inevitable results of the carnival of immorality and sought to cast an occasional sop to the still numerous Puritans by references to the instructive value of their plays. Richard Congreve gives the best single example of the two-faced nature of the morality cant in The Way of The World. He points out in the preface that he shows vice with the hope that the persons seeing it on the stage will learn to shun it; and he addresses his dedication to Madam Bennet, the keeper of a notorious brothel, with the suggestion that she become a patron of the arts.

The natural reaction from this sort of thing

was a Puritanical outburst against literature by Jeremy Collier.¹ He attacked the stage, playwrights, and the whole art of writing. Then it was again up to the writers to justify the existence of literature. Dryden admitted that he had gone astray, and said that he would write clean literature from that time on. Others took up the defense of literature in general. The reaction was what was to be expected, the Aesthetic School defying Collier and refusing to make sermons out of plays, the School of Morals differentiation between the abuse of the literary art in the immoral plays and the right use, that of teaching moral lessons.

There followed an increase in the strength of the School of Morals. It grew in the reign of William and Mary; it fed upon the work of the numerous societies for the improvement of manners and morals, one of which was led by Queen Anne; and by that token of royal favor it took on a tone of nationalism which made it appear to represent the royal and aristocratic taste in literature. It became particularly active in the period of the Tory reaction of Wordsworth, Southey, and Tennyson; and it so characterized much of the

1. Collier, Jeremy: A Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the Stage. 1698.

critical and creative writing of the Victorian period that the term Victorian when applied to literature has become synonymous with moralism. The aesthetic reaction of the Naughty Nineties came naturally after such a period just as the mad cycle of Charles II and James II followed after the rigid restraints of the narrow Puritanism of the Commonwealth.

The basic principle of the School of Morals is aptly epitomized in the second published work from the pen of Henry James, published in the North American Review in January 1865, a critical review of Harriet Elizabeth Prescott's Azarian, An Episode.

"There is surely no principle of fictitious composition so true as this,---that an author's paramount charge is the cure of souls, to the subjection, and if need be to the exclusion of the picturesque."

Upon this rule may be based all the criticism of the School of Morals from the time of Aristotle to the present.

CHAPTER III

HENRY JAMES AS A MORALIST

In plunging into the juvenilia of a great author and bringing forth to the cold gaze of a critical eye the absurdities, the crudities, the inconsistencies which might otherwise have lain decently buried beneath the monumental pile of excellent later productions of the author, one is tempted to clear oneself once for all of the charge of muckraking by doing as Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer did in his study of the same author---to state at the beginning in clear terms that he considers the author the greatest writer of the century, and then to go about his fault-finding with a clear conscience.¹ If it were not for the fact that Henry James's connection with the School of Morals is best shown in his earliest writings when he was a moralist and nothing else, if it were not that the change in him from moralist to aesthete takes place soon after

1. Hueffer, Ford Madox: Henry James; N.Y.; Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1916. "Introduction" p. 9. Let me say at once that I regard the works of Mr. Henry James as those most worthy of attention by the critics,---that Mr. James is the greatest of living writers, and in consequence, for me, the greatest of living men.

he first breaks into print with his critical reviews, I should leave the preliminary essays untouched and go at once to that point where one could best observe the change in critical standards from the moral to the aesthetic. If James had really followed the entirely uneventful course which is ascribed to him by certain¹ of his biographers, he would probably have remained a moralist for a much longer time than he did. But as the change in his critical standards appears within a year from the time when James's articles began appearing in periodicals, I shall consider them from the very first in the order of their appearance, until the change to the aesthetic is unmistakable.

Anyone who has not experienced that exquisite, delicious, almost wicked thrill of exaltation upon receiving for the first time money, real money, for certain literary productions later to appear in print will wonder at the space Henry James gave in Notes of a Son and Brother

1. Miss Rebecca West particularly. She seems to think of James as a most clam-like sort of person, uninfluenced by anything which went on around him. Her strange idea is based on the fact that his injury kept him from doing anything, but she overlooks the fact that a person who is continually observing has his powers of observation so sharpened that he is influenced by things around him more than is the busy man who is continually doing things.

to his recollections of his first essay; and a further consideration of the literary quality of this product may tend to cast some doubt upon the competence so highly praised by James of Charles Eliot Norton, the editor who bought and printed the essay.¹ There is practically nothing in the first critical review to which

1. James, Henry: Notes of a Son and Brother; N. Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914. pp. 404-405. I see before me, in the rich, the many colored light of my room that overhung dear old Ashburton Place from our third floor, the very greenbacks, to the total value of twelve dollars, into which I had changed the cheque representing my first earned wage. I had earned it, I couldn't but feel, with fabulous felicity, a circumstance so strangely mixed with the fact that literary composition of a high order had, at that very table where the greenbacks were spread out, quite viciously declined, and with the air of its being once for all, to "come" on any save its own essential terms, which it seemed to distinguish in the most invidious manner conceivable from mine. It was to insist in all my course on this distinction, and sordid gain thereby never again to seem so easy as in that prime handling of my fee. Other guerdons, of the same queer, the same often rather greasy complexion followed; for what I had done, to the accompaniment of a thrill the most ineffable, an agitation that, as I recapture it, affects me as never exceeded in all my life for fineness, but go one beautiful morning out to Shady Hill at Cambridge and there drink to the lees the offered cup of editorial sweetness?---none ever again to be more deliciously mixed. I had addressed in trembling hope my first fond effort at literary criticism to Charles Eliot Norton, who had lately, and with the highest, brightest competence, come to the rescue of the North American Review, submerged in a stale tradition and gasping for life, and he had not only published it in his very next number----the interval for me of breathless brevity---but he had expressed the liveliest further hospitality, the gage of which was thus at once his welcome to me at home.

one may point as an indication of the underlying force which was to develop into a style of terse comment, keen analysis, and biting humor. The essay begins and ends off the subject.¹ In the beginning the reader is called upon to marvel at the great amount of fiction which an apparently busy man can read, and at the end he is hopelessly mixed up in Henry James's own ideas about the value of Sir Walter Scott's fiction. The only relevant remark which might be classed as criticism is the question as to Mr. Senior's justification for including in his book an essay on the work of one of his relatives.

In his second essay we find the first example of the richly suggestive figures of speech which so thickly stud the pattern of James's critical essays, scintillate throughout his works, and mark the unsigned reviews as indubitable products of James's pen. I have already quoted his remark that the paramount charge of a writer is the cure of souls. He enlarges the idea in an attack on the use of artificial imagery.

"But her primary intention completely disappears

1. Unsigned review of Nassau W. Senior's Essays on Fiction. North American Review, October 1865.

beneath the thick impasto of words and images. Such is the fate of all her creations: either they are still-born, or they survive but a few pages; she smothers them with caresses."

Mr. Ford Madox Hueffer quotes a sentence from James's essay on Baudelaire which claims that it is nonsense for a poet to be a realist, and Mr. Ezra Pound agrees with Hueffer in the conclusion that such a statement from such a source is enough to make one despair of human nature.¹ In this essay on Miss Prescott's Azarian there is a similar remark.

"We would gladly see the vulgar realism which governs the average imagination leavened with a little old-fashioned idealism."

I doubt if Mr. Hueffer and Mr. Pound are right in their assumption that James was an utter realist. This is one of the things in which James did not make appreciable change in his progress from moralism to aestheticism. True,

1. Vide: Pound, Ezra: Instigations; N. Y.; Boni and Liveright, 1920. Ch. II "Henry James." p. 124. "For a poet to be a realist is of course nonsense," and, as Hueffer says, such a sentence from such a source is enough to make one despair of human nature.

in the end he was by no means a representative of that moral idealism which Messrs. Hueffer and Pound seem to consider the only idealism; but he substituted an aesthetic idealism which should not be confused with realism.

In this essay on Azarian, however, the morality of the idealism shown would suit both Hueffer and Pound. "This bad habit of Miss Prescott's is more than an offense against art. Nature herself resents it. It is an injustice to men and women to assume that the fleshly element carries such weight."

The third essay, a review of T. Adolphus Trollope's Lindisfarn Chase¹, looks with Homeric discontent upon "these degenerate days" because so many novels of the present do not contain weighty morals.

"The only definite character we are able to assign to the book is that of an argument against educating English youth in Paris. A paltry aim, the reader may say, for a work of these dimensions. He will say truly:

1. Unsigned review of T. Adolphus Trollope's Lindisfarn Chase, a Novel; The North American Review, January, 1865.

but from such topics as this is the English fiction of the present day glad to draw its inspiration."

The January 1865 issue of The North American Review is enriched by three critical essays by Henry James, and the trio is most uncompromisingly moral. I have mentioned two. The third, a review of Mrs. A. M. C. Seemuller's Emily Chester is particularly interesting in that it gives the moralistic handling of the latter nineteenth century theory of instincts. James is irate, bitter, scornful. He minimizes the strength of the naturalistic philosophy, and says that the absurdity of the theory nullifies its pernicious tendencies.

"The author makes the action of her story rest, not only exclusively, but what is more to the point avowedly upon the temperament, nature, constitution, instincts, of her characters; upon their physical rather than upon their moral sense. It is an attempt to exalt the physical sensibilities into the place of monitors and directors, or at any rate to endow them with supreme force and subtlety. ----It is very common nowadays for young novelists to build up figures minus the soul. There are two ways of eliminating the spiritual principle. One is by effect-

ually diluting it in the description of outward objects ---another is by diluting it in the description of internal objects. In either case the temperament is the nearest approach we have for the soul.

"There is hardly a page in which the author does not insinuate her conviction that, in proportion as a person is finely organized, in so far is he apt to be the slave of his instincts---the subject of unaccountable attractions and repulsions, loathings and yearnings. We do not wish to use harsh words; perhaps, indeed, the word which is in our mind is in these latter days no longer a harsh word. But if the author of Emily Chester is immoral, it is in making her irresponsible. But the absurdity of such a view of human nature nullifies its pernicious tendencies. Beasts and idiots act from their instincts; educated men and women, even when they most violate principle, act from their reason, however perverted, and their affections, however misplaced."

One can almost see in the contrast between these three essays and the first abortive attempt the stabilizing influence of James's feeling that he was attached to the staff of The North American Review, not a free-lance trying



to gain acceptance for unrequested manuscript. It is significant that immediately after his interview with Charles Eliot Norton which resulted in his position he should publish three reviews in one issue, all calculated to raise the tone of that magazine from the stale tradition in which James said it was "gasping for life."

After this January issue James stayed out of print until the American edition of Matthew Arnold's Essays in Criticism was published. Then in the July issue of The North American Review he reviewed these essays. James was considerably influenced by Matthew Arnold's essays, although he remarked conservatively that Arnold had a reputation for "a charming style, a great deal of excellent feeling, and an almost equal amount of questionable reasoning." He liked particularly the idea that criticism deals with fundamental truths and leaves their application to the reader.

"It is the function of criticism to urge the claims of all things to be understood. Our national genius inclines yearly more and more to resolve itself into a vast machine for sifting, in all things, the wheat from the chaff. American society is so shrewd, that we may safely allow it to make its own application

of the truths of the study. Only let us keep it supplied with the truths of the study, and not with the half-truths of the forum. Let criticism take the stream of truth at its source, and then practice can take it half-way down. When criticism takes it half-way down, practice will come poorly off."

In the same issue of The North American Review James reviews Louisa M. Alcott's Moods. He complains that the book does not have a moral, and that the author does not understand human nature. "This story (of husband, wife, and lover) has been told so often that an author's only pretext for telling it again is his consciousness of ability to make it either more entertaining or more instructive; to invest it with incidents more dramatic, or with a more pointed moral. Her book is, to our perception, innocent of any doctrine whatever. The two most striking facts with regard to Moods are the author's ignorance of human nature, and her self-confidence in spite of this ignorance."

It is worthy of note that in this criticism James toys with the aesthetic idea that literature may

be justified by its ability to entertain; but he leans very strongly to the moral side. He differentiates, too, between the author and her book by remarking that in spite of the fact that the book has no moral Miss Alcott "sympathizes throughout her book with none but great things."

In The Noble School of Fiction,¹ published in the first issue of the New York Nation, James gives his view of muscular morality, sanitary sanctity, the Kingsley brothers, and Christian Socialism in general. Several of his remarks merit repetition, especially the last of the list, which shows that James demanded truth in everything which he called beautiful.

"Mr. Henry Kingsley may be described as a reduced copy of his brother.---In him we see the famous muscular system of morality presented in its simplest form, disengaged from the factitious graces of scholarship,----In the muscular faith there is very little that is divine, because there is very little that is spiritual. ----There is, nevertheless, in his novels, and in his brother's

1. Unsigned review of Henry Kingsley's novels; The Nation, July 6, 1865.

as well, a great deal which we might call beautiful, if it were not that this word always suggests something that is true; a great deal which we must, therefore, be content to call pretty."

In the last sentence of the above quotation we see that James is still the complete moralist, that he will not recognize beauty apart from truth, and that he considers truth separate from and above that which the aesthete would call the abstract beautiful. In the next issue of The Nation James repeats the idea, and opposes the tendency of realism with the statement that fiction should not detract from the glory of human nature.

"We do not expect from writers of Mr. Trollope's school (and this we esteem already a great concession) that they shall contribute to the glory of human nature; but we may at least exact that they do not detract from it."¹

2

The Schönberg-Cotta Family gives a new twist to the claim that books which are written with a particular

1. Unsigned review of Anthony Trollope's Miss Mackenzie; The Nation, July 13, 1865.

2. Unsigned review of Sunday School fiction. The Nation, September 14, 1865.

moral in mind are not good fiction. James becomes even more moral than the defenders of Sunday School fiction.

"These books of Sunday reading---frequently contain, as in the present case, an infusion of religious and historical information, and they in all cases embody a moral lesson. This latter fact has been held to render them incompetent as novels; and, doubtless, after all, it does, for of a genuine novel the meaning and lesson are infinite; and here they are carefully narrowed down to a special precept."

1

Passing over the next two essays, which add nothing to our inquiry into James's moralism or aestheticism, we come to a criticism of Edmond Scherer's works. James preferred Edmond Scherer to Sainte-Beuve because of his positive morality.

"We find, and this is the highest praise, it seems to us, that we can give a critic, none but a moral unity: that is, the author is a liberal.

"It is from this moral sense, and, we may add,

1. Unsigned review of Anthony Trollope's Can You Forgive Her? The Nation, September 28, 1865; and an unsigned review of Mrs. A. D. T. Whitney's The Gayworthys, a Story of Threads and Thrums; The North American Review, October 1865.

from their religious convictions, that writers like Scherer derive that steadfast and delicate spiritual force which animates, coördinates, and harmonizes the mass of brief opinions, of undeveloped assertions, of conjectures, of fancies, of sentiments, which are the substance of this work.

"We p~~re~~fer M. Scherer to M. Sainte-Beuve because his morality is positive without being obtrusive; and because, besides the distinction of beauty and ugliness, the aesthetic d~~is~~tinction of right and wrong, there constantly occurs in his pages the moral distinction between good and evil; because, in short, we salute in this fact that wisdom which, after having made the journey round the whole sphere of knowledge, returns at last with a melancholy joy to morality.--- We can pay no higher tribute to his critical worth than by adding that he has found means to unite the keenest logical penetration and the widest theological erudition with the greatest spiritual tolerance."

In The Nation of November 9, 1865, James again expresses the melancholy joy of morality in a scurrilous attack on the character of Miss Braddon.

With the most delicate of innuendo and the most caustically polite periods of barbed sarcasm James tears Miss Braddon's book to pieces, and fills his review with subtle slurs on the character of the author which make one feel that in this case he put the anonymity of the article to good account. The sum total of his criticism seems to be in the question as to how the author knew so much about race-track gamblers, fast society, and the denizens of the demi monde.

"Miss Braddon is the founder of the sensation novel. With people who are not particular, therefore, as to the moral delicacy of the author, or as to her intellectual strength, Miss Braddon is very naturally a favorite."¹

We are now approaching a transition in James's writings. The next few essays show his changing standards and lead directly to the point where he considered literature from the aesthetic standpoint only. Perhaps a more extended view of various phases of aestheticism is necessary before a proper consideration of James's aestheticism can be undertaken.

1. Unsigned review of Miss Braddon's Aurora Floyd.

CHAPTER IV

PHASES OF AESTHETICISM

In a previous chapter I have dealt with the School of Morals and the Aesthetic School from one point of view only, namely, their difference concerning the original justification of literature. The School of Morals claims that literature is justified only insofar as it instructs, teaches a moral lesson, and uplifts mankind. The Aesthetic School claims that literature is justified by the fact that it is pleasing, and that no matter how moral it may be, it is not good literature unless it is pleasing. Obviously these two schools of criticism have a wider scope than that which I have outlined. After defining their fundamental difference of opinion, each school sets out to define its limits and the extent of its applicability. The moralist tells what is moral and what is immoral, and phrases certain demands as to the kind of moral teaching to be included in various literary productions. The aesthete defines aestheticism, divides and subdivides, squabbles with other aesthetes as to shades of difference, and generally splits hairs until---to quote from Miss Rebecca West's book on Henry James---there are "no longer any hairs to

split and his mental gestures become merely the making¹ of agitated passes over a complete baldness."

Out of the mass of hair-splitting literature on the subject certain basic facts can be gathered into a fairly workable theory of aesthetic criticism.

Aesthetic criticism, or rather aesthetics, of which aesthetic criticism is only a part, has been variously described as a science with a definite body of rules and laws, and an intangible, indefinable feeling. Probably a mean point between the two extremes will come close to the truth of the matter. Some definition is certainly possible; but since most of the laws proposed by students of aesthetics are emphatically denied or else ignored by other students equally learned in the subject, aesthetics could hardly be called a science now, though it might develop into one.

Aesthetic experience is differentiated from other kinds of experience in several ways. It is commonly spoken of as an enjoyment, an exercise and

1. Wset, Rebecca: Henry James; London; Nisbet and Company, Ltd. p. 116.

cultivation of feeling. In aesthetic enjoyment capabilities of enjoyment attain their fullest and most perfect development.

The aesthetic value of an object consists in its possessing certain characteristics by which it affects us in a certain desirable way, to draw us into the mood of enjoyable aesthetic contemplation. These characteristics, called "aesthetic qualities" have nothing to do with the usefulness or moral character of the object under consideration. Kant postulates that aesthetic enjoyment must be disinterested, that when we regard an object aesthetically we must not be in the least concerned with its practical significance or value.

There are three forms of beauty: 1, sensuous beauty; 2, beauty of form; 3, beauty of meaning or expression. The fully rounded aesthete enjoys all three of these kinds of beauty to the limit.

Through a long succession of loose thinking on the subject there has come to be some historical basis for the belief that there is a fundamental quarrel between beauty and goodness, between morality and aesthetic enjoyment. Rationally there is no such

quarrel. Those who maintain that there is overlook the fact that the difference of opinion lies in the different ways in which beauty has been defined. It is entirely possible for the moralist to enjoy the aesthetic qualities in external objects to the full; but the fact that so many immoral men have confined their activities to aesthetic enjoyment has put aesthetic enjoyment into disrepute in the judgment of certain unthinking moralists.

Aesthetic morality is based upon a definition of the good in terms of the beautiful. Shaftesbury's Characteristics is saturated with aesthetic morality. Shaftesbury's idea is that there is a law in nature apart from revelation, a law of natural beauty which man would follow if he could find it. The organ which combines the laws of nature and finds the underlying law of beauty is taste. Shaftesbury lays emphasis on ridicule as a test for truth, because, according to his standards, nothing but the beautiful is true, and ridicule will uncover the lack of beauty in the thing discussed. Addison and Steele based their moral lectures on taste and used ridicule as a weapon.

The aesthetic morality which was phrased by

Shaftesbury in the ~~se~~teenth century is restated in the nineteenth century by Ruskin. Ruskin presents the extreme tendency to identify the aesthetic with the moral perception. He divides beauty into six types: 1, infinity, the type of divine incomprehensibility; 2, unity, the type of divine comprehensiveness; 3, repose, the type of divine permanence; 4, symmetry, the type of divine justice; 5, purity, the type of divine energy; and 6, moderation, the type of govern-¹ment by law. Ruskin combined the effects of a Puritan ancestry and early training with an aesthetic education in the arts. There was nothing immoral about Ruskin. But the fact that he defined good in terms of beauty instead of defining beauty in terms of good made him the direct aesthetic ancestor of a line of which he would have been heartily ashamed.

Ruskin said that intensity of feeling measures the superior man. Walter Pater followed Ruskin with the natural corrolary to this statement, that the well

1. Ruskin, John: Modern Painters; Vol. II. "Of Ideas of Beauty."

spent life is the one which applies this superior intensity of feeling to the largest number of experiences. His ideal was intensity of sensation. "To burn always with this hard, gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life."

Pater's heir is Oscar Wilde with his search for the bizarre, Oscar Wilde doing time in prison because he recognized no limitations in his search for the novel in experience, even planning to "get religion" so that there might not remain even that form of emotional thrill foreign to his experience. And last of all, I suppose, comes Wilde's French counterpart, Baudelaire.

Such a succession gives rise to a few general conclusions. The general tendency of aestheticism is toward an over-emphasis of the ability to enjoy sensations in which aesthetic appreciation is involved. The overworking of the aesthetic sensibilities brings about a kind of aesthetic ennui which must be dispelled by a search for strange experiences where the strangeness keeps the aesthetic appreciative faculty alert. The search for the new sensation becomes a search for the bizarre, and degenerates into moral decadence. Thus

the tendency to force aesthetic appreciation to work overtime and to keep it supplied with new sensations to work on brings about the split between moralism and aestheticism. A critic may be purely aesthetic and yet be moral. But when he justifies conduct which is wrong when judged by the moral standards of right and wrong by the claim that it is necessary to the aesthetic fitness of things, he has departed from his moralism and followed the aesthetic argument to its irrational conclusion. The fact that Henry James did this stands not as a proof that he had turned to the Aesthetic School of criticism. He based much of his criticism on aesthetic standards before that event. But it does serve as conclusive proof that he deserted morals entirely and finally "adored beauty and absolutely nothing else in the world."

The aesthetic standpoint may be taken as a basis from which to work toward anything in human experience. There is aestheticism in art, aestheticism in religion, even aestheticism in politics. The critic is concerned mainly with the latter two of the three kinds of beauty, beauty of form and beauty of

meaning or expression. His treatment of sensuous beauty depends upon whether he recognizes morality as well as aesthetics as a standard or whether he discards morality altogether. For instance, two years after James had definitely passed over to the Aesthetic School in criticism we find him, in a review in which he compliments William Morris most highly on his appreciation of the beauty of form, praising him also for "modesty of the imagination"¹ and criticising Swinburne for lack of that quality.

We have abundant examples of the appreciation of the beauty of form in Henry James's works, his critical reviews after 1866, his reminiscences, and the voluminous prefaces to the collected edition of his novels; and James is also an example par excellence of the third, appreciation of the beauty of meaning or expression.

It is not necessary or pertinent to our inquiry to go into all the phases of what is known as the science of aesthetics. Insofar as this science applies to literary criticism, it is confined to an

1. A review of William Morris's The Earthly Paradise; The Nation, July 9, 1868.

abstract appreciation of one of the three kinds of beauty.

I have mentioned Oscar Wilde's statement in De Profundis that he intended to be converted because he wanted to feel that sort of a thrill. There is in this statement an aesthetic approach to Christianity which is closely paralleled in an essay of Henry James which was published thirty-nine years before it. It is in this essay that James shows his complete change to the aesthetic in criticism. I shall consider the aesthetic approach to Christianity more fully in the next chapter which has to do with James's transition from the School of Morals to the Aesthetic School.

CHAPTER V

TRANSITION

It was Walt Whitman who first shook Henry James out of the satisfied composure of his moralistic criticism and made him think in terms of aesthetics. His influence was not sufficient to turn James completely to aestheticism in criticism, but he was the first, though not the largest, contributing factor.

Whitman's blatant vulgarity had long been a thorn in the side of the aristocrat of American letters. Many a time in the long evenings of literary conversation in the remarkable James family Whitman's verse was torn to pieces and held up to ridicule. As far back as the spring of 1861 we find William James writing about Whitman in this fashion:

"You ask me 'why I do not brandish my tomahawk and, like Walt Whitman, raise my barbaric yawp over the roofs of all the houses.' It is because I am not yet a 'cosmos' as that gentleman avowedly is, but only a very dim nebula, doing its modest best, no doubt, to solidify into cosmical dimensions, but

an 'awful sight' of time and pains and patience on the part of its friends."¹

When Whitman published Drum Taps in 1865, Henry James was filled with disgust at the vulgarity and egotistical posturing of the author. He gave vent to his feelings in a review which will be known as long as Whitman is studied.² The basis of James's criticism is purely aesthetic. His claim is that two of the three kinds of aesthetic beauty had been fearfully and intentionally outraged in Whitman's book,--- beauty of form, and beauty of expression.

On the subject of form James says the following: "Mr. Whitman's primary purpose is to celebrate the greatness of our armies; his secondary purpose is to celebrate the greatness of the city of New York. He pursues these objects through a hundred pages of matter which remind us irresistibly of the story of the college professor who, on a venturesome youth bringing him a theme done in blank verse, reminded him that it was not

1. James, William: Letter to Mrs. Tappan. Reprinted in Henry James's Notes of a Son and Brother; N. Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914. p. 233.

2. Mr. Walt Whitman, an unsigned review of Drum Taps; The Nation, November 16, 1865.

customary in writing prose to begin each line with a capital. The frequent capitals are the only marks of verse in Mr. Whitman's writings. There is, fortunately, but one attempt at rhyme. We say fortunately, for if the inequality of Mr. Whitman's lines were self-registering, as it would be in the case of an anticipated syllable at their close, the effect would be painful in the extreme."

Speaking directly to Whitman on the same subject, he says: "But all this is a mistake. To become adopted as a national poet, it is not enough to discard everything in particular and to accept everything in general, to amass crudity upon crudity, to discharge the undigested contents of your blotting-book into the lap of the public. You must respect the public which you address, for it has taste, if you have not. It delights in the grand, the heroic, and the masculine; but it delights to see these conceptions cast into worthy form. It is indifferent to brute sublimity. It will never do for you to thrust your hands into your pockets and cry out that, as the research of form is an intolerable bore, the shortest

and most economical way for the public to embrace its idols---for the nation to realize its genius---is in your own person."

He says further that Whitman outrages the sense and taste of the public "on theory, wilfully, consciously, arrogantly", and that no triumph, however small, is won but through the exercise of art, and this volume is an offense against art.

Note particularly that in this turn to aestheticism as a standard for criticism James has in no way forsaken his moral principles. There is no conflict of right and wrong, good and evil; it is all a matter of outraged taste. Not until James wilfully justifies an act that is wrong by the statement that the act was necessitated by taste does he truly turn away from moralism. Walt Whitman presented no such conflict to the mind of James; there was no such decision to be made. But within a year from the time he wrote his criticism of Whitman he did make that choice, and the cause was not in the field of literature.

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In his criticism of Dickens we find James still

1. Unsigned review of Our Mutual Friend; The Nation, December 21, 1865.

a moralist. He demanded philosophy in the author so that humanity might be uplifted by his productions.

"Mr. Dickens is a great observer and a great humorist, but he is nothing of a philosopher. Some people may hereupon say, so much the better; we say, so much the worse. For a novelist very soon has need of a little philosophy.----A story based upon those elementary passions, in which alone we seek the true and final manifestation of character, must be told in a spirit of intellectual superiority to those passions. That is, the author must understand what he is talking about. The perusal of a story so told is one of the most elevating experiences within the reach of the human mind. The perusal of a story which is not so told is infinitely depressing and unprofitable."

James's attitude towards Anthony Trollope was one of condescending toleration. This quotation from a review of The Belton Estate is typical of his treatment.¹

"We do not make these remarks in a tone of com-

1. Unsigned review. The Nation, January 18, 1866.

plaint. Mr. Trollope has been before the public long enough to have enabled it to take his measure. We do not open his books with the expectation of being thrilled, or convinced, or deeply moved in any way, and, accordingly, when we find one to be as flat as a Dutch landscape, we remind ourselves that we have wittingly travelled into Holland, and that we have no right to abuse the scenery for being in character." This is neither moralism nor aestheticism; it is ennui.

Another aesthetic review of the same sort as that of Whitman's Drum Taps¹ is James's review of Swinburne's Chastelard. The poem is objectionable to James because it lacks the form which is essential to good poetry. Here again we have the aesthetic demand for form and symmetry.

"A dramatic work without design is a monstrosity. We may rudely convey our impression of Chastelard by saying that it has no backbone."

The characteristics of the English nation as

1. Unsigned review. The Nation, January 18, 1866.

shown in Hereward, the Last of the English appealed strongly to James. In a review in The Nation January 25, 1866, he said that Hereward was a masterpiece and Kingsley a genius.

"Hereward is a masterpiece. We have never been partial to Mr. Kingsley's arrogance, his shallowness, his sanctified prejudices; but we have never doubted that he is a man of genius.-----By as much as he is insufferable when he dogmatizes like a schoolboy upon the characteristics of his nation, by so much is he admirable and delightful when he unconsciously expresses them."

In The Nation of February 1, 1866, we find James treating a "Sunday" book very respectfully; but before the end of his review he lapses into a bantering style which shows some change from his former uncompromising, unsmiling moralism.

"Little girls, we suppose, will read it and like it, and for a few days strive to emulate Grace Leigh. But they will eventually relax their spiritual sinews, we trust, and be good once more in a fashion less formidable to their unregenerate elders."¹

1. Unsigned review of Mrs. E. R. Charles's Winifred Bertram.

It is somewhat a relief to the student of James to observe the change from the original unsmiling championship of the "Sunday books" in The Schönb-
berg-Cotta Family. He is none the less moral, but he has found his sense of humor.

James published two reviews in The Nation in the issue of February 22, 1866. The first, a review of Mrs. Gaskell's Wives and Daughters, praises the author for making the story so real to the reader. He says it is powerful, delicate, humorous, and pathetic. The other is a review of Henry D. Sedley's Marian Rooke, and in it James defends his country from the attack of an unsympathetic American.

"So divinely disinterested a hostility was never inspired by a mere interest in abstract truth. A tour of the United States in midwinter, with a fatal succession of bad hotels, exorbitant hack-drivers, impertinent steamboat clerks, thankless female fellow-travellers, and terrific railway collisions, might possibly create in a generous British bosom a certain

lusty personal antipathy to our unmannerly democracy, a vehement and honest expression of which could not fail to make a chapter of picturesque and profitable reading. But it takes an emancipated, a disfranchised, an outlawed, or, if you please, a disappointed American to wish us to believe that he detests us simply on theory."

One wonders whether in this passage James was not giving his charitable view of American Notes and the American parts of Martin Chuzzlewit.

The next work of James shows again that he had not yet departed from the School of Morals in criticism. There is an interesting comparison of Miss Braddon, whom he had recently attacked, with Mrs. D. M. Muloch Craik.¹ Still, one can see in this review that James was not at all blind to the appeal of the less moral of the two writers.

"There is something almost awful in the thought of a writer undertaking to give a detailed picture of the actions of a perfectly virtuous being.

1. Unsigned review of Mrs. Craik's A Noble Life; The Nation, March 1, 1866.

----Miss Muloch is kindly, somewhat dull, pious, and very sentimental---she has both the virtues and the defects which are covered by the untranslatable French word, honnête. Miss Braddon is brilliant, ingenious, and destitute of a ray of sentiment; and we would never dream of calling her honnête. And, as matters stand at present, to say that we prefer the sentimental school to the other, is simply to say that we prefer virtue to vice."

Even more moral is James's discussion of a translation of the works of Epictetus.¹ He says that in the ordinary acceptance of the philosophy the taint of Epictetus is the taint of slavery, but that there is a way in which he can be approached to some advantage.

"That no gain can make up for the loss of virtue is an old story, but Epictetus makes it new--- This is good Stoicism; and to bear it well in mind is neither more nor less, for us moderns, than to apply Epictetus."

Two other reviews come before that one in which the change in James from the moralist to the

1. Unsigned review of Thomas Wentworth Higginson's edition of The Works of Epictetus; The North American Review, April 1866.

aesthete may be judged complete. Between the time he published his review of Drum Taps and the time when he showed unmistakably that the last trench had been won by the aesthetes and moralism had been given up, James shifts from one side to the other, depending upon the subject matter of the various books he reviewed. But there had been no conflict on the question of right and wrong. His aestheticism was still of the sort that is quite consistent with morality. The change will be easily discernible.

The two essays which come before the change are more or less unimportant; they add little or nothing to our investigation. One is a review of Victor Hugo's Les Travailleurs de la Mer in which he compliments Hugo in general but remarks upon a decline in his abilities. The other is a review of George Eliot's Felix Holt, the Radical. He says that the merits of the book are immense, but that there are examples of compromise in¹ it which reduce its value as a work of art.

1. Victor Hugo's Last Novel; Unsigned review. The Nation, April 12, 1866.
George Eliot's Felix Holt, the Radical; Unsigned review, The Nation, August 16, 1866.

I have mentioned the aesthetic approach to Christianity, an approach which is usually found in connection with Catholicism rather than with Protestantism because of the many aesthetic appeals in the Catholic faith and rituals. The next two examples from James's reviews are an interesting study because the first shows nothing of the aesthetic, while the second, which is about the same author, reveals the aesthetic reaction to Catholicism.

The aesthetic turn to Catholicism began in the nineteenth century with Chateaubriand. In 1802 Chateaubriand attempted to bring about a Catholic reaction in the atheistical age of Napoleon and Voltaire. The appeal was made to the historical nationalists. The substance of his argument was that Catholicism lends itself marvellously to effusions of soul. It is a mistaken notion that Catholicism is barbarous, he said, that it is of the Middle Ages, that it retards civilization. What we ought to do is prove that the Christian religion is the most poetic, the most human of all religions. The modern world owes everything to it. It is as poetic as paganism. Chateaubriand compared Hades with Hell, gods with angels, for the beauty of the legends surrounding

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them.

In 1863 Renan wrote about the same aspect of Catholicism.² He was a skeptic. He had lost faith in revealed religion, but he had preserved his delight in the aesthetic aspects of Christianity. He felt that the highest praise for Jesus was that he satisfied the aesthetic sense. Religion, with Renan, had taken refuge in the senses and had become an attribute of literary aesthetic enjoyment.

This attitude toward Christianity has become widespread since Renan's time. An example of the failure to distinguish between religion and aesthetic religiosity is seen in William Mosier's book, The Promise of the Christ Age in Recent Literature, published in 1912. Another example, which I have already mentioned, is Oscar Wilde's De Profundis, published in 1905. Wilde says his epicureanism led him to the feet of Christ. De Profundis is filled with a delicate aesthetic appreciation of Christ, after the manner of Renan.

In The Nation of December 14, 1865, James reviews Eugenie de Guerin's Journal, which had just been

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1. Chateaubriand: Genie de Christianity. 1802.
 2. Renan: Life of Jesus. 1863.

published in English translation. There is in this review nothing of the aesthetic. He compliments the book more for its piety than for its style.

"Her style loses much in translation. It is probable, however, that the book will be accepted for its piety,---- Her peculiar merit is that, without exaltation, enthusiasm, or ecstasy, quietly, steadily, and naturally, she entertained the idea of the Divine Goodness."

Turning now to The Nation of September 13, 1866, we find James's review of Eugenie de Guerin's Letters written from an entirely different point of view. His recognition of the fact that a thing which is "fundamentally repulsive" has "incidental charms" is purely aesthetic. He delights in the aesthetic aspects of this example of pure Catholicism much as Renan would.

"So complete a spiritual submission, so complete an intellectual self-stultification, would be revolting if there were a matter of choice. It is because they are a matter of authority and necessity, things born to and implicitly accepted, that the reader is able to put away his sense of their fundamental repulsiveness sufficiently to allow him to appreciate their incidental charms. It is the utter consistency

of Mlle. de Guerin's faith, the uninterruptedness of her spiritual subjection, that make them beautiful. A question, a doubt, an act of will, the least shadow of a claim to choice----these things would instantly break the charm, deprive the letters of their invaluable distinction, and transform them from a delightful book into a merely readable one. That distinction lies in the fact that they form a work of pure, unmitigated feeling."

Here we have James the aesthete. His change from the moralist school is complete. He stands before this example of complete subjection fearful lest any move on the part of the subject to free herself from a condition fundamentally repulsive may spoil the aesthetic beauties of the incidental charms, as a scientist might stand before some rare specimen of butterfly he had pierced with a pin, fearful lest its struggles to free itself should damage the beautiful colors on the wings. The fact that James recognizes that the spectacle is fundamentally repulsive only adds to the repulsiveness of his own admiration.

But James was to give an even more startling

example of his change to aestheticism and desertion of the School of Morals, evidence in his writings which concerns itself with matters more important than literary judgments and amounts to moral turpitude.

I have shown how James changed from moralist to aesthete, and when the change became apparent. In order to show why it happened, I shall have to go rather thoroughly into the history of events which took place while James was writing the reviews which have been discussed in these chapters, and the aesthetic influences in the fields of art and literature which contributed to the change.

CHAPTER VI

PART I:- JAMES'S DESERTION OF THE SCHOOL OF MORALS

One of the influences which figured largely in James's change to aestheticism was his early desertion of the School of Morals. His aestheticism would probably have developed without the added impetus of this change; his early training and the aesthetic influences of art and literature which surrounded him in his youth would probably have been sufficient, but without this desertion of morality the change to aestheticism might have been considerably delayed. The moral crisis, brought about by events which occurred while he was writing his early critical reviews, left him without a moral philosophic basis and pointed directly towards aestheticism as a standard for actions. This fact may be brought out by a consideration of the historical events which occurred between 1865 and 1868 and James's reaction to these events.

Miss Rebecca West declares that an injury which Henry James sustained in 1861 while assisting in putting

out a fire changed the whole course of his genius.¹
Her opinion is that if he had not been kept from active participation in the Civil War he would have been fascinated by the American scene and would have made this the subject matter of his writings. This romantic estimate of the effect of active participation in war can hardly meet with acceptance. On the contrary, it is almost certain that any close contact with the sordid materialism of war would immediately have disgusted one who was finally driven to more congenial surroundings in Europe by the ugliness of the American scene. But the fact that there was a war and a period of reconstruction undoubtedly did have its effect on Henry James, and perhaps the injury, too, for it served to detach him from the action of the scene and allow him to observe more fully. If a participation in the war could have brought home to James's

1. West, Rebecca: Henry James; London; Nisbet and Company, Ltd. 1916. pp. 19-20. In 1861 the Civil War broke out, and, had it not been for an accident the whole character of Mr. James's genius would have been altered. If he had seen America by the light of bursting shells and flaming forest he might never have taken his eyes off her again, he might have watched her fascinated through all the changes of tone and organization which began at the close of the war, he might have been the Great American Novelist in subject as well as in origin.

consciousness a fuller understanding of the moral values of the struggle, it might have effected a change in him, but as James failed to react to the more definite moral issues of the reconstruction period, it would not be safe to assume that the war would have that result.

There were two incidents of major importance around which all the moral issues of the war were centered, and James failed to see the moral side of either spectacle. The one was Abraham Lincoln's death, and the other was Andrew Johnson's administration and the unsuccessful attempt to impeach him.

When Andrew Johnson succeeded to the Presidency on the death of Abraham Lincoln, April 15, 1865, he endeavored in the administration of his office to reconstruct the Union on the lines laid down by Lincoln. He imposed three conditions on the Confederate States with which they must comply before they should be entitled to representation in Congress, the repeal of their ordinances of secession, the abolition of slavery and the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment, and the

repudiation of their State debts incurred in the war. When these conditions were complied with, Johnson claimed that the Southern States were entitled to representation in Congress. But Congress ignored the moral obligation to allow the Southern States representation in accordance with the program originated by Lincoln and made various other restrictions upon the readmission of the representatives. It was on this moral issue, whether the United States government had not committed itself to the readmission of the Southern States, that Johnson split with Congress.

Throughout his administration from this time on Johnson was at swords points with Congress, which had a two-thirds Republican majority and was therefore able to override his veto. But Congress was not satisfied with this power. Under the leadership of the unscrupulous Thaddeus Stevens the House of Representatives arranged a plot to bring Johnson within the power of Congress and get rid of him once for all. It passed a law restricting the right of the President to demand the resignation of his Cabinet members. Johnson wished to test the constitutionality of this law; so he dismissed

Stanton, the Secretary of War, and appointed General Grant in his place. Thereupon Stevens forced through the House of Representatives a resolution impeaching Johnson for high crimes and misdemeanors.

The fact that Johnson's impeachment was a mere political subterfuge without any basis of right was a matter of common knowledge. He was entirely within his rights in doing the only thing which could have brought the question of the constitutionality of the Tenure of Office law before the Supreme Court. But the opposition to Johnson was not moral; it was based upon two things, political expediency on the one hand and aestheticism on the other.

Aside from the fact that Johnson was an entirely honest man, a fact instantly apparent to a student¹ of the political events of his period, it would be hard to find any man in public life at the time of the Civil War less fitted to fill the office of President. Contrasted with the calm forcefulness of Lincoln, Johnson's

1. The history of this period may be found in detail in James Ford Rhodes's History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule at the South in 1877. 7 Vols. N. Y., Macmillan. Volumes V and VI are given over to the Johnson administration.

hotheaded utterances, his complete lack of taste and a sense of propriety, his habits of intemperance, even his personal appearance shocked the nation deeply.

It was on the aesthetic side that Johnson made himself repugnant to the nation. It was not what he did but the way he did things that made him objectionable. When Thaddeus Stevens and the more radical Republicans attacked him for his policy of reconstruction, Johnson could have held the support of all the more moderate Republicans if he had maintained a dignified silence. Instead he gave utterance to angry remarks of the gravest impropriety and possible danger.

At the end of the term of Congress in the summer of 1866 Johnson and Congress took their quarrel to the country. The next two weeks, from August 28 to September 12, 1866, presented to the citizens of the United States an unparalleled sight, the spectacle of the Chief Executive traveling from one city to another accompanied by a disorderly rabble of fellow-drunkards alobbering forth between hiccoughs vituperative abuses to shouting and hooting mobs who drowned his speeches with insults and contumelious abuse. "He alluded to

Christ, Judas, Moses, Thaddeus Stevens, Wendell Phillips, and Charles Sumner, in a manner which would have been blasphemous and vituperative even in a stump speaker."¹ No such Presidential progress had ever been known. The people, who demanded dignity above all things in their President, stood aghast at the sight; and the demand was raised for the removal upon any pretext whatsoever of a President who so shocked the aesthetic sensibilities of the citizens.

It was this stumping tour, known as Johnson's "swinging around the circle" from a phrase reiterated in each of the speeches, which led directly to Stevens's arranging the impeachment proceedings. The tour itself was characterized in the articles of impeachment as a "high crime."² Johnson had made himself utterly disgusting to the aesthetic sense of the nation. A large part of the approval aroused by the obviously unjust proceedings of impeachment was an example of pure aestheticism in politics.

1. Rhodes. Vol. V. p. 619.

2. The Nation said of it: "Probably no orator of ancient or modern times ever accomplished as much by a fortnight's speaking as Mr. Johnson has done." September 27, 1866.

The assassination of Lincoln and the impeachment trial of Johnson were moral crises in the life of the nation. Let us see how James reacted to them. First there is the tragedy of Lincoln's death.

"The streets were restless, the meeting of the seasons couldn't be but inordinately so, and one's own poor pulses matched----at the supreme pitch of that fusion, for instance, which condensed itself to blackness round-about the dawn of April 15th: I was fairly to go in shame of its being my birthday. These would have been hours of the streets if none others had been----when the huge general gasp filled them like a great earth-shudder and people's eyes met people's eyes without the vulgarity of speech.---The collective sense of what had occurred was of a sadness too noble not to somehow inspire, and it was truly in the air that, whatever we had as a nation produced or failed to produce, we could at least gather round this perfection¹ of a classic woe."

Add to this purely aesthetic appreciation of a sensation, the following reaction to Andrew Johnson.

1. James, Henry: Notes of a Son and Brother; N. Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914. p. 430.

"True enough, as we were to see, the immediate harvest of our loss was almost too ugly to be borne---- for nothing more sharply comes back to me than the tune to which the 'esthetic sense',---recoiled in dismay from the sight of Mr. Andrew Johnson perched on the¹ stricken scene."

So strong is James's feeling of aesthetic disgust that he philosophizes about the probable crimes the people must have committed to bring such a calamity upon them. It is quite picturesquely after the Greek and Roman tradition, but scarcely convincing.

"We had given ourselves a figure-head, and the figure-head sat there in its habit as it lived, and we were to have it in our eyes for three or four years and to ask ourselves in horror what monstrous thing we had done.----It was in vain to say that we had deliberately invoked the 'common' in authority and must drink the wine we had drawn."

Why was it vain, and what was the difference between the commoner Lincoln and the commoner Johnson?

1. Idem pp. 430-431.

To James the difference lay in the fact that Lincoln's "mould-smashing mask" was "precious for representation, and above all for fine suggestion¹al function, in a degree that left behind every medal we had ever played at striking," while Johnson's profile was lost to the engraver because of a bulbous plebeian nose and a lower profile which resembled an inverted wedge of cheese.

So far, James's aesthetic shudders were purely his own affair: he had not attempted to base on them any actions. But consider his reaction to the impeachment.

"What, however, on the further view, was to be more refreshing than to find that there were excesses of the native habit which we truly couldn't bear? so that it was for the next two or three years fairly sustaining to consider that, let the reasons publicly given for the impeachment of the official in question be any that would serve, the grand inward logic or mystic law had been that we really couldn't go on offering each other before the nations the consciousness of such a presence. That was at any rate

1. Idem. pp. 431-432.

the style of reflection to which the humiliating case¹ reduced me."

He is condemned with his own words. Nothing more need be said on the subject. The point of paramount importance to the student of James's critical standards, however, is that just at the time James was recovering from the aesthetic thrill of rallying round the classic woe he put his aestheticism first into print in his attack on Walt Whitman. And exactly during the period when Johnson was giving his best interpretation of the vulture perched on the stricken scene, at the time, I mean, when he was arousing the demand for his impeachment by his disgraceful "swinging around the circle", James was giving literary evidence of the fact that he had deserted morality entirely and chosen the high window of aestheticism for his only outlook on life by writing his aesthetic and entirely immoral appreciation of Mlle. de Guerin's Letters, which was printed the day after Johnson returned to the White House.

PART II:- JAMES'S AESTHETICISM

Henry James's aestheticism was the logical result of his religious and philosophical line of descent and the artistic and literary aesthetic influences in his early training.

In three generations the James family went through that course of philosophical development which can be traced in a number of parallels through the development of thought in New England----from Puritanism to an intense moralism which held less of the fear of hell-fire, thence to Transcendentalism, mysticism, and finally aestheticism. The divisions are substantially three. The mind is first concerned chiefly with hopes of Heaven and fear of Hell; then it is centered on a rigid morality on earth; after which the idea of Hell dies out, transcendental ideas of universal goodness come in to weaken the claims of strict morality, and finally, with no Hell on which to base the demands of morality and no morality on which to base philosophy, adrift on a sea of doubt, the mind turns to other standards on which to base belief and actions. It takes only the urge of environment to bring aestheticism into this line of succession.

Henry James's grandfather, William James, was¹
a Presbyterian of the strictest kind. It affected
him so much that in his old age he became estranged from
two of his sons because of their defection from what he
considered the only true faith.²

Henry James, Sr., represents the second step
in the development. Much influenced by mysticism and
transcendentalism, he built up for himself a personal
religion and philosophy different from all known creeds

1. The Literary Remains of Henry James (Sr.) Ed. William James. N. Y.; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1884. pp. 152-153
Our family at all events perfectly illustrated this common
vice of contented isolation. Like all other families of
the land it gave no sign of a spontaneous religious cul-
ture, or of affections touched to the dimensions of uni-
versal man. In fact, religious truth at that day, as
it seems to me, was at the very lowest ebb of formal
remorseless dogmatism it had ever reached, and offered
nothing whatever to conciliate the enmity of ~~the~~ unwilling
hearts. When I remember the clergy who used to frequent
my father's house, which offered the freest hospitality
to any number of the cloth, and recall the tone of the
religious world generally with which I was familiar, I
find my memory is charged with absolutely no incident
either of manners or of conversation which would ever
lead me to suppose that religion was anything more to
its votaries than a higher prudence---

2. The Letters of William James, Edited by his son. Boston;
Atlantic Monthly Press; 1920. p. 4. Theological differences
estranged him from two of his sons,---William and Henry,---
and though the old man became reconciled to one of them
a few days before his death, he left a will which would
have cut them both off with small annuities if its
elaborate provisions had been sustained by the Court.

but based to a large degree on ideas gleaned from his correspondence with Ralph Waldo Emerson and from his deep studies of the writings of Swedenborg. He made¹ no attempt to urge his views on his sons, a result, perhaps, of the unpleasant recollection of the continual attempts of his father to force Presbyterianism on him, and Henry and William² grew up without the slightest religious influence except the occasional partial explanations drawn from their father by direct questions.

1. James, Henry: Notes of a Son and Brother; N. Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914. pp. 159-160. Nothing could have exceeded at the same time our general sense ----for our good fortune in never having been, even when most helpless, dragged by any approach to a faint jerk over the threshold of the inhabitable temple. (of his father's faith) It stood there in the center of our family life, into which its doors of fine austere bronze opened straight; we passed and repassed them when we didn't more consciously go round and behind; we took for granted vague grand things within, but we never paused to peer or penetrate, and none the less never has the so natural and wistful, perhaps even the so properly resentful, "Oh I say, do look in a moment for manners if for nothing else!" called after us as we went.

2. Idem. p. 170. ---no directness of experience ever stirred for me; it being the case in the first place that I scarce remember, as to all our young time, the crossing of our threshold of any faint shade of an ecclesiastical presence, or the lightest encounter with any such elsewhere---. We knew in truth nothing whatever about them---and they remained for us---such creatures of pure hearsay that when in my late teens, and in particular after my twentieth year, I began to see them portrayed by George Eliot and Anthony Trollope the effect was the disclosure of a new and romantic species.

Not only did Henry James learn nothing of his father's religion, which was to him a closed temple into which he never ventured, but he was kept free from all religious contact, the bad impression made upon Henry James, Sr., by the "number of the cloth" who were constantly enjoying the hospitality of his father's house keeping him from offering a similar religious contact to his sons. The result was that, although he gained from his father a basis of morality which is shown in his earliest essays, he was entirely unreligious, even somewhat bored by the consideration of abstract ideas of any sort. Since this morality had no firm foundation of religious principles to make its mandates peremptory, it is not surprising that it did not withstand the test of the Johnson spectacle, towards which all his early training urged him to react aesthetically.

In 1855 the James family went abroad, to spend four years travelling about over Europe, stopping in Switzerland, Germany, and France. Their ostensible purpose was to give the boys, William, Henry (then twelve years old), and Wilky, the advantage of Swiss education. It is characteristic of the family that they spent sev-

eral years wandering about before actually getting to the Swiss schools at all. William James followed a course in the Academy, while Henry spent perhaps the most unpleasant months of his existence trying to master the first rudiments of mathematics in the Institution Rochette, a preparatory school which specialized in scientific training. In a short time Henry was given up as hopeless, and the rest of his time in Europe was spent in amassing impressions.

He developed a theory of impressions, a sort of creed by which he justified his complete absorption in the search. "To feel a unity, a character and tone in one's impressions, to feel them related and all harmoniously colored, that was positively to face the aesthetic, the creative, even, quite wondrously, the critical life and almost on the spot to commence author."¹ Again, he says, "Impressions were not merely all right but were the dearest things in the world."² And, "Never did I quote strike off, I think, that impressions might themselves be science."³

1. Notes of a Son and Brother; pp. 24-25.

2. Idem. p. 25.

3. Idem. p. 26.

Four of the most formative and impressionable years of his life were given up to "tasting" different flavors of impressions in Europe. There was no plan of education; each of the boys went in for the kind of schooling which pleased his fancy, and emerged immediately whenever his fancy changed. It was a singularly personal sort of education for Henry James. He followed his interests wherever they led him, and his interests were in carrying away from each country a feeling of the artistic unity of its many different impressions. This sort of education was peculiarly adapted to developing in James the artistic and aesthetic feelings which he was later to apply to art and finally to literature.

The next step in his aesthetic development was the study of art, a study to which he was brought by his habit of becoming interested in whatever his elder brother was doing. The family was in Paris in 1859, and it was quite characteristic in them to decide to leave the fountain-head of artistic knowledge and return to America in order to give William a chance to study art. It was, however, quite a natural step

1. Idem. p. 62. I alone of all the family perhaps made bold not to say quite directly or literally that we went home to learn to paint. People stared or laughed when we said it, and I disliked their thinking us so simple.

for it brought William and Henry under the tuition of William Hunt, who was as Parisian in his painting as anyone in Paris and was besides a friend of the family.¹

Henry James spent the next few months in the studio of William Hunt dabbling in art and spending his spare hours in a perusal of the Revue des Deux Mondes. No very great attempt was made to make an artist of him; he was simply allowed to wander about the studio, making occasional sketches of plaster models, and absorbing artistic impressions. These impressions were less of art than of the artistic life in general and of artists. He developed an interest in the life of the artist which was reflected in his early stories about artists and artistic studies. For² William Hunt himself he had a great admiration.

1. Idem. p. 61. The particular ground for our defection which I obscurely pronounced mistaken, was that since William was to embrace the artistic career---our return to America would place him in prompt and happy relation to William Hunt, then the most original of our painters as well as one of the most original and delightful of men.---But never surely has so odd a motive operated for a break with the spell of Paris.

2. Idem. p. 83. It was impossible to me at that time not so to admire him that his just being to such an extent, as from top to toe and in every accent and motion, the living and communication Artist, made the issue, with his presence, quite cease to be of how one got on or fell short, and become instead a mere self-sacrificing vision of the picturesque itself, the constituted picturesque or treated "subject", in efficient figure, personal form, vivid human style.

Artistic and literary influences blended imperceptibly together in a kind of aesthetic unity which left no break between the two as James turned his attention from art to literature. His months of drawing in the studio of William Hunt gave him a feeling for art and an interest in the artist as a subject which was easily turned into material for his literary creations. James says of this transition from art to literature after he had discovered that he could never be more than a very mediocre artist, "Therefore if somewhat later on I could still so fondly hang about in that air of production (in the studio) ----it was altogether in the form of mere helpless admirer and inhaler, led captive in part by the dawning perception that the arts were all essentially one and that even with canvas and brush whisked out of my grasp I still needn't feel disinherited."¹

This idea of the unity of the arts he owed to Ruskin, the influence of whose Modern Painters James received both at first and second hand, through reading, and through association with Charles Eliot Norton. Indeed it may easily be shown that James was

1. Idem. p. 97.

completely saturated with Ruskin and that his development in aesthetic ideas was largely due to his familiarity with Ruskin's ideas. Certain descriptive passages in Travelling Companions, a story James published in The Atlantic Monthly in November and December of 1870, are exactly in the style of Ruskin's Modern Painters, and the subject matter of the story is the¹ result of James's interest in artists as a type.

1. The following two examples from Travelling Companions will serve to show how greatly James was influenced by Modern Painters:

Those who have rambled among the marble immensities of the summit of Milan Cathedral will hardly expect me to describe them. It is only when they have been seen as a complete concentric whole that they can be properly appreciated. It was not as a whole that I saw them; a week in Italy had assured me that I have not the architectural coup d'oeil. In looking back on the scene into which we emerged from the stifling spiral of the ascent, I have chiefly a confused sense of an immense skyward elevation and a fierce blinding efflorescence of fantastic forms of marble. There, reared for the action of the sun, you find a vast marble world. The solid whiteness lies in mighty slabs along the iridescent slopes of nave and transept, like the lonely snow-fields of the higher Alps. It leaps and climbs and shoots and attacks the unsheltered blue with a keen and joyous incision. It meets the pitiless sun with a more than equal glow; the day falters, declines, expires, but the marble shines forever, unmelted and unintermittent. You will know what I mean if you have looked upward from the Piazza at midnight. With confounding frequency, too, on some uttermost point of a pinnacle, its plastic force explodes into satisfied rest in some perfect flower of a figure. A myriad carven statues, known only to the circling air, are poised and niched beyond reach of human vision, the loss of which to

John La Farge was an influence both artistic and literary which followed after, and was for some time concomitant with the influence of William Hunt. He was the other interesting person at Newport. An artist and a very well educated man, he brought the intensity of his interest in things artistic and literary to bear upon Henry James so that for some time the whole course of James's reading was determined by

Note cont'd.---mortal eyes is, I suppose, the gain of the Church and the Lord. Among all the jewelled shrines and overwrought tabernacles of Italy, I have seen no such magnificent waste of labor, no such glorious synthesis of cunning secrets. As you wander, sweating and blinking, over the changing levels of the edifice, your eye catches at a hundred points the little profile of a little saint, looking out into the dizzy air, a pair of folded hands praying to the bright immediate heavens, a sandalled monkish foot planted on the edge of the white abyss. And then, beside this mighty world of the great Cathedral itself, you possess a view of all green Lombardy,----vast, lazy Lombardy, resting from its Alpine upheavals.

Within the church, the deep brown shadow-masses, the thick-tinted air, the gorgeous composite darkness, reigned in richer, quainter, more fantastic gloom than my feeble pen can reproduce the likeness of. From those rude concavities of the dome and semi-dome, where the multitudinous facets of pictorial mosaic shimmer and twinkle in their own dull brightness; from the vast antiquity of innumerable marbles, incrusting the walls in roughly mating slabs, cracked and polished and triple-tinted with eternal service; from the wavy carpet of compacted stone, where a thousand once-lighted fragments glimmer through the long attrition of idle feet and devoted knees; from sombre gold and mellow alabaster, from porphyry and malachite, from long dead crystal and the sparkle of undying lamps,---there proceeds a dense rich atmosphere of splendor and sanctity which transports the half-stupefied traveller to the age of a simpler and more awful faith.

him. James says of him, "He was really an artistic, an esthetic nature of wondrous homogeneity; one was to have known in the future many an unfolding that went with a larger ease and a shrewder economy, but never to have seen a subtler mind or a more generously wasteful passion, in other words a sincerer one, addressed to the problems of the designer and painter."¹

But although his influence in the field of art paralleled that of William Hunt, and he probably served to make more strong James's interest in the artist type, John La Farge's influence on James was more in the field of literature than of art. In the first place, his was the guiding hand which led James through the mazes of the Revue des Deux Mondes,² a periodical from which at

1. Notes of a Son and Brother; p. 91.

2. Idem. pp. 86-87. I well recall my small anxious foresight as to a required, an indispensable provision against either assault or dearth, as if the question might be of standing an indefinite siege; and how a certain particular capacious closet in a house we were presently to occupy took on to my fond fancy the likeness at once of a store of edibles, both substantial and succulent, and of a hoard of ammunition for the defense of any breach---the Revue accumulating on its shelves at last in serried rows and really building up beneath us with its slender firm salmon-colored blocks an alternative sphere of habitation.---But the point for the moment was that one would have pushed into that world of the closet, one would have wandered and stumbled about in it quite alone if it hadn't been that La Farge was somehow always in it with us.

that time James was gathering nearly all his literary impressions. La Farge's influence on James's literary taste was important both in its scope and in its intensity. The following paragraph from Notes of a Son and Brother will show where their interests turned and how deep an impression La Farge made on James.

"He had been through a Catholic college in Paryland, the name of which, though I am not assured of it now, exhaled a sort of educational elegance; but where and when he had so miraculously laid up his stores of reading and achieved his universal saturation was what we longest kept asking ourselves. Many of these depths I couldn't pretend to sound, but it was immediate and appreciable that he revealed to us Browning for instance; and this, oddly enough, long after Men and Women had begun (from our Paris time on, if I remember) to lie upon our parents' book-table. They had not divined in us as yet an aptitude for that author; whose appeal indeed John reinforced to our eyes by the reproduction of a beautiful series of illustrative drawings, two or three of which he was never to surpass---and more than he was to complete his highly distinguished plan for the full set, not the least faded of his hundred dreams. Most of all he revealed to us Balzac; having so much to tell me of what was within that formidably-plated

door, in which he all expertly and insidiously played the key, that to re-read even after long years the introductory pages of *Eugenie Grandet*, breathlessly seized and earnestly absorbed under his instruction, is to see my initiator's youthful face, so irregular but so refined, look out at me between the lines as through blurred prison bars."¹

In 1865 Henry James wrote his first literary review and sent it to Charles Eliot Norton, the editor of the North American Review.² The review was received with favor and published in the next number of the magazine, the October issue; and James was invited to Shady Hill to meet Charles Eliot Norton and make plans for future articles of the same sort. James was immensely impressed by this invitation and the interest shown in him, and the meeting of the two men marked the beginning of a friendship which had a large influence on James's writing.³

1. pp. 92-93.

2. For a full account see Note 1, p. 19.

3. James says of it, in Notes of a Son and Brother, pp. 405-406, "I was to grow fond of regarding as a positive consecration to letters that half-hour in the long library at Shady Hill,---for what did I do again and again, through all the years, but handle in plenty what I might have called the small change of it?"

Charles Eliot Norton was an aesthetic influence almost equal to that of James's own knowledge of and saturation in the ideas of Ruskin. He stood for some time in the position of guide, philosopher, and friend to the young James, and there is no way of estimating with any accuracy the degree of his influence. It is certain that this influence was great, and that it served to deepen the effect and broaden the application of James's already developed Ruskinism. Norton was a close friend of Ruskin's, and he had made an exhaustive study of Modern Painters and applied the theories to all phases of criticism in the fields of art and literature. Ruskin wrote about him as follows: "And thus I became possessed of my second friend, after Dr. John Brown, and of my first real tutor, Charles Eliot Norton. In every branch of classical literature he was my superior, knew old English writers better than I ---much more, old French; and had active fellowship and close friendship with the then really progressive leaders of thought in his own country Longfellow, Lowell, and Emerson.

"All the sympathy and all the critical subtlety of his mind had been given, not only to the reading, but

to the trial and following out of the whole theory of Modern Painters; so that, as I said, it was a very real joy for him to meet me, and a very bright and singular one for both of us¹---."

The influence of Charles Eliot Norton is the last of those which I should class as formative influences, that is to say, the influences which were actively in operation before James had given written evidence of the fact that he was purely aesthetic in his critical theory. Later influences, Matthew Arnold and Walter Pater, for instance, tend to change the style of his aestheticism, but they do not figure in its origin.

1. Ruskin, John: Praeterita; London; George Allen and Sons, 1910. 3 Vols. Vol. III. pp. 77-79.

CHAPTER VII

LATER ESSAYS

Although this study is directed chiefly toward a consideration of the origin of James's standards, the changes, and the formative influences, it will be well to round out the investigation by considering James's aestheticism as shown in certain of his later essays. Seldom after the time of his aesthetic reaction to Lincoln and Johnson did James strike a purely moral note in his critical essays; there was always a touch of aestheticism, so that we conclude that James conceived of conduct as aesthetically agreeable or disagreeable rather than as ethically right or wrong. I shall take up one at a time various essays, touching upon each decade of his life, and consider the aesthetic standpoint from which they were written.

The first book of essays which James published was French Poets and Novelists.¹ This was published in 1878, a year before James's study of Hawthorne appeared in the English Men of Letters series. Ezra Pound says that

1. James, Henry: French Poets and Novelists; London, and N. Y.; Macmillan and Company, 1893.

this book is disgustingly full of Puritan morality. A very careful perusal of its contents fails to reveal any of it. Indeed morality is conspicuously absent, almost indecently so in places. The illustrations given hereafter are typical of the whole book.

Consider, for example, the sharp contrast between James's vulgarly stated curiosity about the adventures of Miss Braddon¹ which would qualify her to write about the race-track and his ironical but complete acceptance of the peccadilloes of Alfred de Musset, which he justified on the grounds that they resulted in good literature.

"Alfred de Musset's superfine organization, his exaltations and his weaknesses, his pangs and his tears, his passions and his debaucheries, his intemperance and his idleness, his innumerable mistresses (with whatever pangs and miseries it may seem proper to attribute to them), his quarrel with a woman of genius, and the scandals, exposures, and recriminations that are so ungracefully bound up with it---all this was necessary in order that we should have the two or three little volumes into which his best is compressed. It certainly takes a great

1. Vide ante p.31.

deal of life to make a little art! In this case, however, we must remember, that little is exquisite."¹

Except for the expression of a doubt as to the adviseableness of his choice of subjects, James has no condemnation for Baudelaire, and much praise for his artistry. Here we have expressed again that appreciation of incidental charms in a thing fundamentally repulsive which we noted in James's review of Mlle. de Guerin's Letters.² The following excerpts

from his essay will reveal the artist's point of view.

"His great quality was an inordinate cultivation of the sense of the picturesque, and his care was for how things looked, and whether some kind of imaginative amusement was not to be got out of them, much more than for what they meant and whither they led and what was their use in human life at large."³

"A good way to embrace Baudelaire at a glance is to say that he was, in his treatment of evil, exactly what Hawthorne was not---Hawthorne, who felt the thing at its source, deep in the human consciousness."⁴

1. French Poets and Novelists; p. 30.

2. Vide ante pp. 54-55.

3. French Poets and Novelists; p. 59.

4. Idem. p. 61.

"Moreover his natural sense of the superficial picturesqueness of the miserable and the unclean was extremely acute.---The idea that Baudelaire imported into his theme was, as a general thing, an intensification of its repulsiveness, but it was at any rate ingenious."¹

Ivan Turgenieff influenced James considerably in his creative writing. James admired him for his aesthetic appreciation of sensations both of life and of religion. An interesting note in the following appreciative statement is that about Turgenieff's feeling for the passion and beauty of religion.

"Imagination guides his hand and modulates his touch, and makes the artist worthy of the observer. In a word, he is universally sensitive. In susceptibility to the sensuous impressions of life---to colours and odours and forms, and the myriad ineffable refinements and enticements of beauty---he equals, and even surpasses, the most accomplished representatives of the French school of story-telling; and yet he has, on the other hand, an apprehension of man's religious impulses, of the ascetic passion, the capacity of becoming dead

1. Idem. p. 63.

to colours and odours and beauty, never dreamed of in the philosophy of Balzac and Flaubert, Octave Feuillet and Gustave Droz.---Let us add, in conclusion, that his merit of form is of the first order."¹

Religion, then, we must assume, meant to James nothing more than a sort of complementary passion to the sensuous, a capacity of becoming dead to colors, odors, and beauty, in other words a kind of negative aesthetic thrill.

One of the most important, as well as the longest, of James's literary essays was Nathaniel Hawthorne, which was published in 1879 in the English Men of Letters series. This is a book comprising almost two hundred pages of history, biography, and criticism. In it James shows that his admiration for Hawthorne is based on the latter's ability to make picturesque literary capital out of the Puritan conscience, and incidentally reveals himself as an expatriated American and an utter snob.

It is quite reasonable that one who depended to such an extent upon the richness of impression and association to be gathered from his surroundings

should feel keenly the poverty of Hawthorne's external life, the decidedly unliterary influence of the small New England town and the monotony of every-day adventure. James expresses this feeling in the following paragraph.

"One might enumerate the items of high civilization, as it exists in other countries, which are absent from the texture of American life, until it should become a wonder to know what was left. No State, in the European sense of the word, and indeed barely a specific national name. No sovereign, no court, no personal loyalty, no aristocracy, no church, no clergy, no army, no diplomatic service, no country gentlemen, no palaces, no castles, nor manors, nor old country-houses, nor parsonages, nor thatched cottages, nor ivied ruins; no cathedrals, nor abbeys, nor little Norman churches; no great Universities nor public schools---no Oxford, nor Eton, nor Harrow; no literature, no novels, no museums, no pictures, no political society, no sporting class---no Epsom nor Ascot! Some such list as this might be drawn up of the absent things in the American life of forty years ago, the effect of which upon an English or a French imagination, would probably,

as a general thing, be appalling. The natural remark, in the almost lurid light of such an indictment, would be that, if these things are left out, everything is left out. The American knows that a good deal remains; what it is that remains---that is his secret, his joke, as one may say. It would be cruel, in this terrible denudation, to deny him the consolation of his national gift, that 'American humour' of which of late years we have heard so much."¹

It is not surprising, I say, that James, with all his love for things that are surrounded, entwined, ivy-covered, and enriched with associations of all kinds, should have leaned toward the European rather than the American view of the denuded condition of American life, and that he should have given this pseudo-Ruskinian² account of it. It is most picturesquely Jamesian, and it is not for this that I have characterized him as a snob. It is quite reasonable that anyone should prefer the schloss on the Rhine to the ice-house on the Hudson. The following little bit of superiority,

1. James, Henry: Nathaniel Hawthorne; N. Y.; Harper and Brothers, 1879. pp. 42-43.

2. Compare Ruskin's refusal to come to America because he would not go to a country which had no castles or ivied ruins.

however, is of a different color.

"We are told by Mr. Lathrop that there existed at Salem, during the early part of Hawthorne's life, 'a strong circle of wealthy families', which 'maintained rigorously the distinctions of class,' and whose 'entertainments were splendid, their manners magnificent.' This is a rather pictorial way of saying that there were a number of people in the place---the commercial and professional aristocracy, as it were---who lived in high comfort and respectability, and who, in their small provincial way doubtless had pretensions to be exclusive. Into this delectable company Mr. Lathrop¹ intimates that his hero was free to penetrate."

Of course Mr. Lathrop's phraseology invited the attack, but one is inclined to turn upon James his own incredulous comment about the "divinely disinterested² hostility" of Henry D. Sedley, and inquire what unsung episode in the life of the young social climber is enbalm^d in this paragraph, what house of provincial New England aristocracy was closed to him---in his Cambridge period, perhaps---by the too late (1789) arrival in America of his Irish grandfather.

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne; p. 45.

2. Vide ante pp. 48-49.

James's appreciation of Hawthorne is purely aesthetic; his admiration is chiefly aroused by the fact that Hawthorne colored his narratives with the New England consciousness of sin without being bound by it personally.

"This is the real charm of Hawthorne's writing ---this purity and spontaneity and naturalness of fancy. For the rest, it is interesting to see how it borrowed a particular colour from the other faculties that lay near it---how the imagination, in this capital son of the old Puritans, reflected the hue of the more purely moral part, of the dusky, overshadowed conscience. The conscience, by no fault of its own, in every genuine offshoot of that sombre lineage, lay under the shadow of the sense of sin. This darkening cloud was no essential part of the nature of the individual; it stood fixed in the general moral heaven under which he grew up and looked at life. It projected from above, from outside, a black patch over his spirit, and it was for him to do what he could with the black patch. There were all sorts of ways of dealing with it.---Hawthorne's way was the best, for he contrived

by an exquisite process, best known to himself, to transmute this heavy moral burden into the very substance of the imagination, to make it evaporate in the light and charming fumes of artistic production. ---Nothing is more curious and interesting than this almost exclusively imported character of the sense of sin in Hawthorne's mind; it seemed to exist there merely for an artistic or literary purpose.---His relation to it was only, as one may say, intellectual; it was not moral and theological. He played with it, and used it as a pigment; he treated it, as the metaphysicians say, objectively. ---He speaks of the dark disapproval with which his old ancestors, in the case of their coming to life, would see him trifling away as a story-teller. But how far more darkly would they have frowned could they have understood that he had converted the very principle of their own being into one of his toys!----What pleased him in such subjects was their picturesqueness, their rich duskiness of colour, their chiaroscuro; but they were not the expression of a hopeless, or even of a predominantly melancholy, feeling about the human soul.¹

1. Nathaniel Hawthorne; pp. 56-59.

In 1888 James published Partial Portraits, a series of essays on literary subjects chiefly reprints of articles published in various magazines in the five years before their appearance in book form. Three samples from this collection will serve to show the tenor of the whole work.

James seemed always to be interested more in the form and style of a writer than in his morality. Even when morality is clearly evident, James bases his praise on the form rather than the content. Take¹ for instance the essay on Robert Louis Stevenson.

"The subject is endlessly interesting, and rich in all sorts of provocation, and Mr. Stevenson is to be congratulated on having touched the core of it. I may do him injustice, but it is, however, here, not the profundity of the idea which strikes me so much as the art of the presentation---the extremely successful form. There is a genuine feeling for the perpetual moral question, a fresh sense of the difficulty of being good and the brutishness of being bad; but what there is above all is a singular ability in holding

1. James, Henry: Partial Portraits; London; Macmillan and Company, 1888. p. 169. "Robert Louis Stevenson" first appeared in The Century Magazine April 1888.

the interest. I confess that that, to my sense, is the most edifying thing in the short, rapid, concentrated story, which is really a masterpiece of concision."

The same thing is said of Alphonse Daudet.¹
"Like most of the French imaginative writers (judged, at least, from the English standpoint) he is much less concerned with the moral, the metaphysical world, than with the sensible. We proceed usually from the former to the latter, while the French reverse the process. Except in politics, they are uncomfortable in the presence of abstractions, and lose no time in reducing them to the concrete. But even the concrete, for them, is a field for poetry, which brings us to the fact that the delightful thing in Daudet's talent is the inveterate poetical touch."

The last article in the collection is an essay on the art of fiction. This is very Ruskinian in its identification and unification of all the arts, and it is very aesthetic in its statements of the purpose of the novel. I shall quote from a number of his paragraphs.

"The only reason for the existence of a novel is that it does attempt to represent life. When it relinquishes this attempt, the same attempt that we see on the canvas of the painter, it will have arrived at a very strange pass. It is not expected of the picture that it will make itself humble in order to be forgiven; and the analogy between the art of the painter and the art of the novelist is, so far as I am able to see, complete."¹

"The only obligation to which in advance we may hold a novel, without incurring the accusation of being arbitrary, is that it be interesting."²

The following is an interesting discussion of morality in relation to the novel.

"Will you not define your terms and explain how (a novel being a picture) a picture can be either moral or immoral? You wish to paint a moral picture or carve a moral statue: will you not tell us how you would set about it? We are discussing the Art of

1. Idem. p. 378. "The Art of Fiction" was first published in Longman's Magazine in September 1884.

2. Idem. p. 384.

Fiction; questions of art are questions (in the widest sense) of execution; questions of morality are quite another affair."¹

Between 1888 and 1893 James wrote a series of literary essays which he published in 1893 in Essays in London and Elsewhere.² The most important of the essays in this book are "James Russell Lowell" and "Criticism", the first written in 1891 and the second in 1893.

It is interesting to note how James placed Lowell's style above his morality. The following two quotations will illustrate the point.

"His poetical performance might sometimes, no doubt, be more intensely lyrical, but it is hard to see how it could be more intensely moral---I mean,³ of course, in the widest sense of the term."

"It was in looking at him as a man of letters that one drew closest to him, and some of his more fanatical friends are not to be deterred from regarding his career as in the last analysis a tribute to the dominion of style. This is the idea that to my sense his name most promptly evokes; and though it was not

1. Idem. pp. 404-405.

2. Harper and Brothers Publishers, N.Y.

3. Essays in London and Elsewhere; p. 61.

by any means the only idea he cherished, the unity of his career is surely to be found in it."¹

Before turning to the essay on criticism, let us consider a part of the essay on Gustave Flaubert. There are three sentences here which may be taken as an answer to Mr. Brownell, telling him in James's own words why the hope that his philosophy might prevail was "the youngest of his cares."² The reason, too, is purely aesthetic, the idea of individual standards of appreciation, the aristocracy of feeling.

"Why feel, and feel genuinely, so much about 'art', in order to feel so little about its privilege? Why proclaim it on the one hand the hoyl of holies, only to let your behavior confess it on the other a temple open to the winds? Why be angry that so few people care for the real thing, since this aversion of the many leaves a luxury of space?"³

The essay on criticism shows somewhat the large influence that Matthew Arnold's ideas had on James. It contains chiefly the idea of the sacer-

1. Essays in London and Elsewhere; p. 45.

2. Vide ante p. 2. Note 1; and p. 3.

3. Essays in London and Elsewhere; p. 149.

dotal nature of the office of critic, the idea expressed in his essay on Matthew Arnold that the critic should take the stream of truth at its source.

"In this light one sees the critic as the real helper of the artist, a torch-bearing outrider, the interpreter, the brother. ----When one thinks of the outfit required for free work in this spirit, one is ready to pay almost any homage to the intelligence that has put it on; and when one considers the noble figure completely equipped---armed cap à pie in curiosity and sympathy---one falls in love with the apparition. It certainly represents the knight who has knelt through his long vigil and who has the piety of his office. ¹ For there is something sacrificial in his function."

James's affection for Balzac and all his works was, I believe, based on an aesthetic admiration for one who could "burn always with hard, gem-like flame." In 1905 James published a book containing two lectures, ² The Question of Our Speech, and The Lesson of Balzac. The first of these lectures deals with the American habit of ignoring the tone qualities of language, and

¹
1. Idem. p. 264.

²
2. The Question of Our Speech; Boston and N.Y.; Houghton Mifflin Company, 1905.

the second draws the moral of intensity from the works and life of Balzac. One may conclude from a study of this essay something about the extent of the influence of Walter Pater on James. The following paragraph is a good summary of the whole essay.

"That is how we see him, living in his garden, and it is by reason of the restless energy with which he circulated there that I hold his fortune and his privilege, in spite of the burden of his toil and the brevity of his immediate reward, to have been before any others enviable. It is strange enough, but what most abides with us, as we follow his steps, is a sense of the intellectual luxury he enjoyed.----Balzac's luxury, as I call it, was in the extraordinary number and length of his radiating and ramifying corridors---the labyrinth in which he finally lost himself. What it comes back to, in other words, is the intensity with which we live---and his intensity is recorded for us on every page of his work."¹

Among the last of James's writings is an essay on Rupert Brooke, which was published as the introduc-

1. The Question of Our Speech; "The Lesson of Balzac" pp. 83-85.

tion to a collection of Brooke's letters in 1916.¹

In this essay we find the final expression of that aestheticism which had been James's philosophic basis since 1886. The form it takes in this essay casts an interesting light on the whole life of the author. It might be called the resultant of all the major forces which had moulded James's life. From early boyhood James was intensely interested in things that had what he called "associations." Outside things, his surroundings, his associates, the "tone" or "flavor" of whatever country he happened to be in, affected him as great influential factors. He was interested in tracing the effects of country and national traditions on writers. The first evidence of this interest shown in his critical writings is found in his review of Hereward the Last of the English,² in which he said that Kingsley was admirable and delightful when he unconsciously expressed the characteristics of his nation. The last evidence of this interest is in his treatment of Brooke.

1. Letters From America by Rupert Brooke with a preface by Henry James; N.Y.; Charles Scribner's Sons. 1916.

2. Vide ante p. 47.

There was no high moral appeal to James in the life and death of Brooke; he did not feel any great exaltation in the fact that the poet had shown high idealism in answering the first call of his country, nor any regret that his genius had been snuffed out by his untimely death. On the contrary, his interest in Brooke was in the fact that Brooke was a complete, fully rounded representative of the modern¹ product of the English tradition of culture, and he expressed a ghoulis satisfaction that death had concluded the episode because that event made the whole so beautifully poetic.

"He had never seemed more animated with our newest and least deluded, least conventionalized life and perception and sensibility, and that formula of his so distinctively fortunate, his overflowing share in our most developed social heritage which had already

1. Letters From America; Introduction; pp. xiii-xiv. What it first and foremost really comes to, I think, is the fact that at an hour when the civilized peoples are on exhibition, quite finally and sharply on show, to each other and to the world, as they absolutely never in all their long history have been before, the English tradition (both of amenity and energy I naturally mean), should have flowered at once into a specimen so beautifully producible.

glimmered, began with this occasion to hang about him¹ as one of the aspects, really a shining one, of his fate."

The idea seemed to be that the most complete representative of a dying social order, that order represented by the unlimited expansion of pre-war days, could do nothing more sublimely poetic than gracefully die with the dying order. The following develops the idea more fully.

"Everything about him of the keenest and brightest (yes, absolutely of brightest) suggestion made so for his having been charged with every privilege, every humor, of our merciless actuality, our fatal excess of opportunity, that what indeed could the full assurance of this be but that, finding in him the most charming object in its course, the great tide was to lift him and sweep him away? Questions and reflections after the fact, perhaps, yet haunting for the time and for the short interval that was still to elapse---when, with the sudden news that he had met his doom, an irrepressible 'of course, of course!' contributed its note well-nigh of support. It was as if the peculiar

1. Idem. pp. xxxix-xl.

richness of his youth had itself marked its limit, so that what his own spirit was inevitably to feel about his 'chances'---required, in the wondrous way, the consecration of the event.¹"

Thus we have in this last essay, written in the year James died, the final culmination of James's aestheticism in an essay showing the author entirely unstirred by the inspiring moral spectacle of a young poet making the supreme sacrifice for his ideals of patriotism and democracy, but expressing great aesthetic satisfaction at the coincidence of the death of the "perfect specimen" with the downfall (as he thought) of the civilization that produced him.

1. Idem. p. xl.

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